

The colour of memories

Artist Daniel Novela revisits the golden Africa of his childhood every time he picks up a paintbrush

Daniel Novela is a compulsively creative man who can't make it through the day without painting. His sophisticated landscapes have infiltrated galleries and private collections as his special brand of African Impressionism becomes better known. His journey is an almost stereotypical story of an artist's passion and hardship. It is the story of a man who would not let go of his dream.

"I was born in Makado but my Mozambican father took the family back to his home in Gaza as National Party politics grew increasingly sinister. I remember so well the wide open spaces of northern Mozambique, the miles and miles of ploughed land, the farms. There was such a strong sense of community. People knew you, knew your family. There was a sense of belonging. It was an idyllic childhood,

the happiest days of my life and I return there with every painting.

"But the war and famine forced us to flee to South Africa to my mother's family in Klerksdorp.

There was a different kind of war there – apartheid. It was the end of the road for my studies. I couldn't speak the language and art wasn't taught in township schools.

"I was desperate. I wrote a letter to the Minister of Education in Brazil begging for assistance and was ecstatic when the department responded. Sadly, they needed documents I didn't have so that was the end of it. I was devastated. I wanted to study so badly. I still have the letter. But it was over so I went to work in the local Indian store.

"I would paint at night and sell my paintings outside the old Shoprite Checkers so that we could buy food. I was married to Frangely by then

and had two little children. She'd always been so supportive of my painting. She knows if a day goes by and I haven't held a paintbrush in my hand, then I feel the day was wasted.

"Then I heard about a monthly craft market in town and I started selling there. I stopped working to paint professionally. It was hard. Many nights we went to bed hungry and often we'd travel somewhere to sell my work and land up with no money to get home. Then I met Dr Van Zyl who referred me to the Vaal Technikon where I enrolled to study for a National Diploma in Fine Art. I can't explain the joy of returning to study."

As his work became better known, Daniel was able to produce larger canvases that better expressed his increasingly refined and sophisticated technique. "My technique evolved a lot through my studies but my subject matter remained the same – memories of that happy childhood, open fields under an endless sky, the Africa that was mine when I was a boy."

Since his graduation in 2000, Daniel has exhibited regularly in South Africa as well as the US, Germany, Switzerland and Britain. From pavements and flea markets in rural North West to some of the world's finest galleries, he has always attracted attention. Every exhibition leads to another because another collector or dealer stumbles upon this artist's extraordinary ability to capture vast landscapes with detailed delicacy.

"While I am all African, my style is not typically African. I gravitate

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towards Impressionism particularly John Constable, Trevor Chamberlain and Richard Schmid. I also admire South African artist Adriaan Boshoff."

Recently, Novela exhibited his work at the Adlou Art Gallery under the curatorship of Linda and Willie Pauwel and Louise Boshoff, Adriaan's daughter, as well as in Stafford, England over Christmas last year. His work is currently on exhibition at the Kretschmann Gallery in Port Elizabeth. **GH**

SOURCES

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